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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
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S E C R E T ANKARA 001547

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [GG](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY LINKS USS MOUNT WHITNEY PASSAGE WITH GLOBAL
HAWK

REF: A. STATE 90976
[1](#)B. ANKARA 1542

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reason 1.4 (b,c,d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) This is an urgent action message. Post requests immediate guidance on request for USS Mount Whitney to transit the Turkish Straits.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) As noted in ref b, Turkey has granted permission for overflight of its airspace by Global Hawk missions to conduct surveillance over Georgia. In conveying this, however, MFA U/S Apakan reiterated to Charge concern about the Mount Whitney's notified passage on August 31 and asked that it be delayed. The MFA followed this up on August 27 by advising that US failure to withdraw its notification of the Mount Whitney transit raises "serious questions" about the Global Hawk missions.

[1](#)3. (C) Under the Montreux Convention, the maximum size of warships passing through the Straits is 15,000 tons. Publicly available information on the Mount Whitney (including its own website) lists the ship's displacement as 18,000 tons, exceeding the Montreux limits. Turkish opposition politicians and the press have already asked questions about the Mount Whitney and other non-Black Sea littorals' ship transits. In addition, the nature of the ship as a command and control platform gives the appearance, the Turks argue, that the US presence in the Black Sea is a surface battle group, not a humanitarian assistance mission. If a ship apparently exceeding Montreux limits transit, we can expect a press flurry with allegations that the US (and GOT) are complicit in violating the Montreux. Our ship passage, not Russian aggression in Georgia and U.S. humanitarian assistance, will be the story.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Turkey is not questioning the passage of the Mount Whitney under the Montreux Convention, but seeks to avoid a domestic crisis over its passage that would compromise its ability to work in support of the NATO/Western agenda on Georgia. Turkey has asked that the US delay for a significant period (at least a couple of weeks, not a few days) the passage of the Mount Whitney. Alternatively, Turkey has proposed that the humanitarian assistance to be delivered by the Mount Whitney be delivered by smaller craft that will not raise questions of Montreux Convention compliance.

Comment

[1](#)5. (S/NF) Guidance in ref a indicates that the Global Hawk missions are our must-have, and that Washington may be prepared to reconsider the timing of the Mount Whitney transit request. Insisting on this transit at this time may imperil Global Hawk. If we expect tensions in the Caucasus to persist for some time, then it will be critical at the outset that we maintain a productive and respectful working relationship with the Turks to ensure future intel collection

and unimpeded Straits passage.

16. (S/NF) ACTION REQUEST: Post requests urgent instructions on how to respond to the GoT request to delay or cancel the transit of Mount Whitney.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

WILSON

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End Cable Text